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Executive Assistant Director, OCD

28 September 1948

Acting Chief, Biographic Register

Progress of Biographic Register

REFERENCES: A. ORE Instruction 31-47, dated 15 July 1947
B. NSCID No. 8, dated 25 May 1948.

1. The over-all mission of the Biographic Register is stated in Reference A, above. In brief, the mission requires that BR maintain data on individuals and organizations in all categories, provide data upon request, and conduct surveys and prepare reports to point up gaps and deficiencies in the centralized biographic program. By Reference B, above, the general responsibilities of the Register were particularized with respect to foreign scientists and technicians.

2. The general mission of the BR is of a magnitude that has not been accurately gauged. Successful prosecution, however, would require personnel numbering in the hundreds and space and machines far in excess of anything now held or contemplated in budgetary planning. From the first, therefore, the Register has been obliged to confine its activities to fields of the highest intelligence potential not wholly within the cognizance of another official intelligence agency. The scientific field was early seen as an objective of this type and considerable progress toward this end had been made before NSCID No. 8 (Ref. B) had been published.

3. The publishing of NSCID No. 8 confirmed the necessity of proceeding with a limited mission and since that time the BR has proceeded to:

a. Process into its files data on all scientists and scientific organizations of intelligence significance but concentrating on Germany and the USSR.

b. Provide biographical data on persons in all categories when requested by an office or branch of CIA. Otherwise the processing of data pertaining to political, economic, sociological, military, and air categories has been suspended. *largely*

4. With reference to 3 a., above, the Register has been instructed by the Assistant Director to work into its files the backlog of scientific biographical data held by the IAC agencies. Pursuant to this instruction the Register on 1 June 1948 began to work the index cards prepared by the Scientific Branch, Department of the Navy, on German scientists working for Russia. The portion of the project represented by the cards covering this particular group of scientists is approaching completion and some 1700 cards have been processed to date. All of the resources of the Register except for two (2) persons processing requests have been concentrated on this task. Very little current material has been processed except for that contained in selected top secret documents.

58/981
BR 47-57

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

- 2 -

5. As a result of the priority assigned to taking up agency backlogs, the operations of the Register have been reduced to the lowest denominator. The process is almost entirely mechanical and its routine aspects have occasioned a morale problem with the professional workers engaged upon it. A more important consideration however is the fact that the data contained in the cards is so fragmentary and undigested as to raise doubt concerning its value when measured against the loss of time to current material.

6. At the same time the Navy cards were taken over, a new method of recording data was initiated in the Register. Dossiers were transferred entirely to a machine system by requiring that all biographical data obtained be transcribed onto machine cards which could be punched as to name, nationality and case number. The principal advantage sought in instituting this system was to make biographical facts readily available by machine sorting and facilitate reproduction of data on large numbers of individuals by means of the Telefax process. While there are obvious advantages to a machine dossier its shortcomings are serious because of its extreme rigidity with reference to material processed and the complex controls required. The most important immediate problem is the fact that the making up of the cards is a very slow and complex procedure which is drastically curtailing the numbers of individuals processed. Other problems exist with respect to the quality of reports that can be obtained from the machine cards and to allied research considerations. The most far reaching result of the system, however, may be that its routine approach will have an adverse effect upon the Register's securing appropriate research grades and retaining properly qualified analysts. Finally, the reproduction machine for which the system was set up does not exist and from what can be learned in this office will not become available until some time in the indefinite future. It is, therefore, entirely possible that the Register is expending much time and labor for a system which much later may prove to be impracticable.

7. The BR is far short of accomplishing its over-all mission as stated in Reference A. Regardless of how much the Register receives in personnel and administrative support, the full accomplishment of their mission will be held up until certain fundamental responsibilities regarding fields of endeavor other than scientific are cleared up with the IAC agencies. Within the area assigned by NSCID No. 8 the most significant shortcoming is the fact that no research is being carried out to assess the quality and timeliness of the data being recorded, to ascertain gaps in available information, or to add to the value of information by following movements of scientific individuals, the growth of scientific societies, etc.

8. The organization recently approved by management provides for a Scientific Research Division and an Area Research Division. It will be desirable to activate both of these divisions, a process which actually entails simply separating the geographical function from the present scientific program. In this connection it will be desirable to find a suitable field of research for the Area Division. It is not thought that this Division should enter aimlessly into all fields of endeavor, but should

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

- 3 -

concentrate on some category not the sole responsibility of an IAC agency. At present the economics is not the responsibility of any IAC department, and it is believed that consideration should be given to assigning the area division a mission in this field.

9. As of 1 September 1948 the BR had processed [] individuals, of whom [] were scientific. Considering the limitations in personnel and equipment this is regarded as a generally satisfactory level of operations. It is not thought, however, that the BR will be an effective central intelligence instrument unless it processes from [] individuals per year, with attendant work in organizations and allied research projects. This will require the filling of the present T/O as rapidly as possible and critically examining all processes to insure the maximum utilization of personnel and machines.

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